



Rethinking social movement micromobilization: Multi-stage theory and the role of social ties

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Abstract

Micromobilization research constitutes a vital stream within social movement studies. Despite a wealth of empirical research and recent advances in micromobilization theory, research is still hampered by a myriad of issues. This article identifies conceptual, empirical, and methodological weaknesses in the micromobilization literature and offers solutions. First, the author provides a clear definition of micromobilization by synthesizing two distinct, yet interrelated research streams that, on the one hand, emphasize the processes through which social movement organizations attempt to recruit and influence potential supporters and participants and, on the other hand, enumerate various analytically distinct steps that make up micromobilization. Using this as a springboard, the author then evaluates the strengths and weaknesses of a longstanding, popular model of micromobilization that he terms the ‘affinity-initiated model.’ This micromobilization model is extended in significant ways by merging insights from extant social movement, social psychology, and network analysis literatures, pinpointing novel and overlooked ways social ties, in particular, facilitate the differentiation of individuals at analytically distinct steps in the micromobilization process. Finally, the author identifies several avenues for future micromobilization research opened up by the analytic approach developed in this article.

Keywords

Activism, micromobilization, multi-stage theory, social movement, social ties

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Introduction

Micromobilization has been of longstanding interest to social movement scholars. Much of the sociological literature treats micromobilization as a static, binary dependent variable (see e.g., Barkan et al., 1995; Kitts, 1999; Nepstad and Smith, 1999; Passy and Giugni, 2001; Walsh and Warland, 1983; Wiltfang and McAdam, 1991) – individuals either participate or do not (Snow et al., 1986) – rather than as a multi-step, ongoing process (for exceptions, however, see Beyerlein and Hipp, 2006; Klandermans and Oegema, 1987; Munson, 2008; Oegema and Klandermans, 1994). Identifying attributes participants possess and non-participants lack is the *sine qua non* of this sociological literature (Munson, 2008).

An important – though often ignored – issue in this literature revolves around matters of definition. What is it exactly that we are (or should be) studying when we examine micromobilization? Before scholars can argue constructively about what factors affect (and how they affect) micromobilization, we need to build consensus around what exactly micromobilization is. Is micromobilization the same as ‘differential participation’ (i.e., participating vs. not participating)? Is examining why someone is *willing* to participate in collective action equivalent to an examination of collective action *participation*? These questions have only been addressed indirectly and sporadically for the most part. As a result, different studies – operating with varied definitions and conceptualizations – have sometimes generated vague and seemingly contradictory results.

Despite the large amount of sociological work in this area, conceptual ambiguities persist. Historically, the concept of micromobilization has been used in two rather distinct ways. Earlier work by Snow et al. (1986: 465) conceived of micromobilization as ‘the range of interactive processes devised and employed by SMOs and their representative actors to mobilize or influence various target groups with respect to the pursuit of collective or common interests’. This definition built on earlier works by Gamson et al. (1982) and Walsh (1981) and turns attention toward processes that differentiate collective action participants and non-participants. However, as subsequent scholars would point out years later, these early perspectives tended to overemphasize the role interests, values, and beliefs played in micromobilization. Focusing exclusively on frame alignment, these early authors elevated the cognitive dimensions of culture at the expense of the emotions from which cognitive structures derived much of their causal force (Goodwin et al., 2001; Jasper, 1997, 1998, 2011; Jasper and Poulsen, 1995). Moreover, the approach relegated processes of differentiation to something mostly organizations (strategically) accomplished. Later research, however, would distinguish between organizational mobilization attempts (Gerhards and Rucht, 1992) and mobilization attempts initiated by individuals and small groups (Bekkers et al., 2011).

On the other hand, while participation is the ultimate outcome to be accounted for, more recent scholarship on micromobilization identifies several analytically distinct steps that combine to generate this outcome of interest (Beyerlein and Hipp, 2006; Klandermans and Oegema, 1987; Munson, 2008; Oegema and Klandermans, 1994). Micromobilization is thus, in more contemporary scholarship, conceptualized as a multi-stage process in which distinct mechanisms differentiate individuals at each stage (Klandermans, 1984; Schussman and Soule, 2005; Viterba, 2013).

Of course, definitions matter because they provide the boundaries within which concepts are developed and, by extension, the signposts scholars use to guide their research. Without minimal agreement on these boundaries, concepts become unclear and researchers often speak past rather than to each other. Merging insights from classical sociological perspectives with contemporary multi-stage theory, I therefore suggest that micromobilization refers to individuals' *(a) passage through analytically distinct steps of incorporation into collective action, (b) each of which results in individuals being differentiated through cognitive (e.g., identity development), affective (e.g., emotion development), and/or structural processes (e.g., recruitment and social ties)*. This definition is advantageous because it blends insights from theoretical advances in the modeling of micromobilization (e.g., Beyerlein and Hipp, 2006; Klandermans, 2004; Klandermans and Oegema, 1987; Munson, 2008; Oegema and Klandermans, 1994; Schussman and Soule, 2005; Viterna, 2013) with what has been a more traditional sociological focus on cognitive mechanisms of differentiation (e.g., Gamson et al., 1982; Snow et al., 1986; Walsh, 1981), while at the same time acknowledging recent insights emerging from scholarship on the sociology of emotions (e.g., Goodwin et al., 2000, 2001; Jasper, 1997, 1998, 2011; Jasper and Poulsen, 1995).

My definitional change is simple, yet may have far-reaching implications. While definitions remain fluid and contested, mine is an initial attempt to integrate and synthesize a rather diverse, yet interrelated, body of sociological micromobilization literature in order to devise a more coherent research agenda for the future. By extension, I am suggesting researchers attune their agendas not simply to an analysis of (1) a single participation/non-participation binary outcome but, instead, (2) focus on identifying analytically distinct steps leading to participation and, in so doing, (3) examine the potentially similar and dissimilar processes through which individuals are differentiated at each of these steps.

Using this synthesized conceptualization as a springboard, the rest of the article identifies theoretical gaps and clarifies persistent conceptual ambiguities in micromobilization literature with the purpose of developing a stronger analytical framework for understanding social movement micromobilization. I begin with an examination of what I have identified to be the dominant perspective on how social movement micromobilization works, which I have termed: the affinity-initiated model. Here, the term refers to an individual's ideological affinity with or support for a movement. Along the way I note the model's shortcomings and strengths. Finally, drawing on a wide range of primarily (though not exclusively) sociological literatures in the subfields of social movement studies, social psychology, and network analysis and blending these with existing multi-stage theory, I offer a novel synthesis of how social ties – widely believed to play a central role in micromobilization – can affect the probability an individual will be selected 'in' or 'out' at *multiple* stages in this ongoing process. In so doing, I extend recent scholarship in multi-stage theory.

Using these insights, I then outline a research agenda that suggests new avenues for empirical research in micromobilization. I suggest scholars think not only about participation but also participation in *what?*, that they conceptualize participation itself as an ongoing and dynamic process rather than a static and final step in the micromobilization chain, and consider potential feedback effects operating among analytically distinct micromobilization steps.

Examining models of social movement micromobilization

Affinity-initiated model

The dominant model of movement mobilization in recent decades conceptualizes the phenomenon as one in which movement congruent beliefs play a critical role in jump-starting micromobilization. Movement participation hinges on whether or not individuals initially possess an ideological affinity with a movement. For ease of analysis, I have subsumed the following variations under the term affinity-initiated model: Klandermans and Oegema's (1987) four-step process, Beyerlein and Hipp's (2006) two-step process, and various other single-step iterations (e.g., Barkan et al., 1995; Kitts, 1999; McAdam, 1986; Nepstad and Smith, 1999; Passy and Giugni, 2001; Walsh and Warland, 1983; Wiltfang and McAdam, 1991). While there is little consensus as to the specific number of stages involved in the micromobilization process, the assumption among proponents of this model – either explicitly stated or implicitly assumed – is that individuals join a movement initially as a result of movement congruent beliefs and attitudes. Subsequent participation then hinges on translating this ideological affinity into motivation to act, which in turn must be transformed into actual participation.

Single-step model

Much of the extant literature on the micromobilization process rests implicitly on the single-step affinity-initiated model. While useful in its own right, it obscures as much as it clarifies. A number of studies empirically model mobilization as a process involving a single step in which (most often) individuals sharing an ideological affinity with a movement or individuals willing to participate end up either participating or failing to participate. Researchers then focus on factors thought to influence actual participation, among a pool of individuals that support a movement. At best this truncated sampling results in a partial understanding of the micromobilization process, placing a black box around the initial formation of these ideological-affinity pools. At worst it perpetuates and normalizes the inherent limitations of this model. Movement literature is rife with examples of how this strategy has become the norm in much of the micromobilization literature.

McAdam (1986), for instance, identified influential factors that distinguished Freedom Summer applicants who ended up actually participating in the campaign from those who never made it to Mississippi. While a valuable early study in micromobilization, the sampling and methodological approach does not allow McAdam to model micromobilization as anything beyond a single-step process. As Beyerlein and Hipp (2006: 220) rightly point out, this is because 'studies like McAdam's (1986) consist entirely of people who are already committed to the goals and tactics of movements.' While most of this research – including McAdam's (1986) – does not explicitly argue that micromobilization is a single-step process, the general approach is problematic when viewed in a more cumulative sense. When such approaches become *de rigueur*, our understanding of the micromobilization process becomes unnecessarily truncated.

As such, we know less about exactly how initial ideological affinity with a movement is generated, only that it is assumed to play some significant role in some early part of the

micromobilization process. The result is study after study technically able to address 'among individuals sharing an ideological affinity with a movement, who participated' or 'among movement members, who participated more,' yet unable to more clearly demonstrate why individuals initially support a movement and how this ideological affinity is translated into motivation to act. While this core body of social movement literature does not preclude the possibility of conceptualizing micromobilization as a process involving more than one step, the sampling and methodological strategies employed do limit the scope of results obtained.

Two-step model

With an eye toward addressing the inherent limitations of treating micromobilization as a single step phenomenon, Beyerlein and Hipp (2006) purposefully used a nationally representative sample of adults in their study of protest in the United States. This allowed them to model movement participation as a two-stage process in which individuals were differentiated based on their willingness to participate and, then, whether or not they actually participated. This strategy helped them identify factors influencing willingness to protest and, separately, factors influencing actual participation.

Beyerlein and Hipp (2006) treat the differentiation of *willingness* and *unwillingness* to participate in movement activism as the first stage in what they argue is a two-step process. However, extant theory suggests the most basic step in the process to be the delineation of the mobilization potential, defined as individuals ideologically aligned with a movement (Klandermans and Oegema, 1987; Oegema and Klandermans, 1994). The two-step model proffered by Beyerlein and Hipp (2006) implicitly assumes that the differentiation of ideological affinity is an important precondition for subsequent micromobilization, yet remains silent on the details of how this initial step unfolds. Again, why some individuals end up supporting a movement while others rebuff them remains unexplored. These one- and two-step models fail to consider how individuals pass through subsequent stages of micromobilization when ideological affinity with a movement is the starting point. Doing so, however, is critical because the mobilization potential 'constitutes a necessary, but not sufficient pre-condition of final mobilization' (Kriesi et al., 1993: 157).

However, Viterna's (2013) recent research on female members of El Salvador's *Farabundo Marti National Liberation Front* (FMLN) provides insight into the development of this initial affinity process. Drawing on literatures rooted in identity theory and symbolic interactionism (MacKinnon and Heise, 2010; Stryker, 1980, 2000; Stryker and Burke, 2000), Viterna argues that because identities are both internally held and externally assigned (see also Brubaker and Cooper, 2000), are defined through social interactions and cultural representations, and play a key role in motivating behaviors, they contribute significantly to participation in social activism. In other words, individuals initially become engaged by developing a 'participation identity,' in which an individual 'perceive[s] participation to be highly congruent with, or even protective of, [his or her] most salient existing identities given a particular arena of interaction' (Viterna, 2013: 51). Shedding light on the processes by which this occurs, Viterna argues that individuals are most likely to develop a participation identity – and, thus, become willing to engage

in activism – (1) when they believe their personal skills and resources allow them to make a meaningful contribution to the movement, (2) when social ties exist between movement members and potential participants, thereby giving potential recruits an opportunity to see that participants are ‘just like me’ (Lamont, 1992; Small et al., 2010; Swidler, 1986, 2001), (3) when social movements successfully frame social movement participation as a way of protecting one’s sacred identities, and (4) when social movements employ narratives that resonate emotionally with potential participants (Viterna, 2013: 52–54; see also Polletta and Jasper, 2001). Through processes both internal and external, potential social movement participants develop the requisite attitudes, identities, and dispositions needed to engage in activism.

Four-step model

Mobilization potential. Perhaps the most well-known and precisely delineated articulation of this affinity-initiated model lies in Klandermans and Oegema (1987) and Oegema and Klandermans’ (1994) work on the Dutch peace movement. For these authors, the initial stage of the micromobilization process differentiates those who do not support a movement from those who do. Supporters make up the mobilization potential. Individuals who do not belong to a movement’s mobilization potential will not involve themselves in the movement even if targeted for recruitment by social movement organizations. Therefore, the boundaries within which a recruitment campaign may succeed are delimited by the mobilization potential (Klandermans and Oegema, 1987), making its demarcation a crucial first step in the multi-stage mobilization process (Kriesi et al., 1993).

Recruitment networks and mobilization attempts. The second step involves recruitment networks and mobilization attempts. Mobilizing consensus becomes irrelevant if a movement lacks access to recruitment networks through which individuals may become targets of recruitment attempts. Mobilization attempts can occur through mass media, mail, and ties to organizations and other individuals (especially friends) (Klandermans and Oegema, 1987). The key for my purposes here has less to do with the multiplicity of avenues by which recruitment may or may not be realized and everything to do with the fact that its proponents suggest targeted recruitment attempts through networks represent the crucial and *causally necessary next step* in the micromobilization process. This is a point to which I return throughout the remainder of the article.

Motivation or willingness to participate. Next, individuals are differentiated according to their willingness to participate in movement activity. Some may be willing to participate while others remain unwilling. Prior research demonstrates that even actual members of SMOs vary in their level of intensity and commitment (Kitts, 1999; Oliver, 1984; Passy and Giugni, 2001; Wiltfang and McAdam, 1991). Passy and Giugni (2001), for example, distinguish among more or less intense participation, grouping members into three categories: subscribers (donate money to an organization), adherents (participate in activities irregularly), and activists (participate in activities regularly). Similarly, members of the mobilization potential may possess a willingness to participate to greater or lesser degrees (Oegema and Klandermans, 1994: 704).

Actual participation. In the fourth and final stage, motivated individuals are sorted according to whether or not they made this final commitment to a movement. Klandermans and Oegema (1987: 520) note that willingness to participate, alone, is a 'necessary but insufficient condition of participation.' Willingness to participate leads to actual participation when barriers to participation are removed. A greater degree of willingness to participate helps one overcome greater barriers; however, ultimately it is up to movements to generate enough motivation, remove barriers altogether, or implement some ideal combination of the two in order to get interested individuals to actually participate (Klandermans, 1984; Klandermans and Oegema, 1987).

Shortcomings of the affinity-initiated models

Extant research using the affinity-initiated model reduces the micromobilization process to an empirical analysis of one or two steps, foregoing analysis or theoretical consideration of other important stages, or (as is the case with the Klandermans and Oegema model, as well as much of the network analyses of mobilization, including, for instance: McAdam, 2000; McAdam and Paulsen, 1993) implies recruitment and network linkages operate as *causally necessary* factors that come into play only at a *specific* point in the micromobilization process. Alternatively, I propose that recruitment and network linkages be stripped of any causally deterministic quality and, instead, be treated as mobilizing structures that affect the likelihood that an individual will be selected 'in' or 'out' at *multiple* steps throughout this process. Some (Jasper and Young, 2007) have argued that Klandermans and Oegema's (1987) model overemphasizes social ties' causally necessary role in micromobilization. In fact, quite often networks may play little role in pulling individuals into social movements (Fisher and McInerney, 2012; Jasper, 1997, 1998; Jasper and Poulsen, 1995; Jasper and Young, 2007; Luker, 1984), despite contrary popular consensus (Jasper and Young, 2007). Focusing on network structure, Centola and Macy (2007) even found that networks composed of too many weak ties could impede the diffusion of collective behaviors with higher adoption thresholds, such as high-risk social movement activism. This is not to say that networks do not matter. Several authors have argued persuasively that they may in many cases (Barkan et al., 1995; Kitts, 1999; McAdam, 1986; McAdam and Paulsen, 1993; Passy and Giugni, 2001; Snow et al., 1980). However, not every social behavior diffuses the same way through networks (Centola and Macy, 2007) and, often, their causal effects are exaggerated and unclear (Jasper and Young, 2007).

I suggest that Klandermans and Oegema (1987) actually under-theorize the role social ties play in the micromobilization process. Rather than solely conceiving of recruitment and mobilization attempts as a causally necessary precondition for the generation of collective action-awareness (that may or may not translate into motivation), I argue social ties are best conceived of as conduits of processes affecting the likelihood individuals will support a movement, be motivated to participate, and/or actually participate. My approach (a) explicitly acknowledges the *probabilistic* influence of social ties on micromobilization, following Jasper and Young (2007), rather than tethering them to a strong causal determinism implied in the Klandermans and Oegema (1987) model, and (b) (as discussed below) allows me to more fully theorize social ties' differentiating capacities

by identifying *varied* ways they might influence differentiation at *multiple* analytically distinct steps (rather than just a single step) in the micromobilization process. While social ties may play a critical role in generating awareness about opportunities to participate in collective action, I argue they can accomplish much more. In so doing I offer a reformulation and extension – not a wholesale refutation – of the invaluable model developed by Klandermans and Oegema.

Reconceptualizing the role of social ties in micromobilization

For quite some time, ‘structural availability’ – the ‘presence of interpersonal networks which facilitate recruitment to activism’ (Schussman and Soule, 2005: 1086) – has been a central concept in the study of micromobilization. While a number of important factors, such as biographical availability and psychological and political engagement, have been found to be important in micromobilization, social ties hold a preeminent place in this literature.

Rather than suggesting social ties and networks are central to micromobilization because they exist as a kind of *necessary* hurdle that must be cleared only at a particular point in a prescribed, uni-directional sequence of steps, I argue social ties are of central importance because they act as conduits channeling social process that affect the likelihood individuals are differentiated at multiple analytically distinct micromobilization stages. Below, I suggest how social ties might help differentiate individuals at each of the (now) three steps in my revised version of the Klandermans and Oegema (1987) model.

Differentiating ideological affinity. Interrelated processes of consensus mobilization and frame alignment generate movement support. This section examines the critical role social ties play in these processes. Klandermans (1984: 586) refers to consensus mobilization as ‘a process through which a social movement tries to obtain support for its viewpoints.’ This is a purposeful effort and doing so requires that movements engage in public struggles aimed at defining collective goods and developing and justifying strategies and tactics, all the while engaging and countering opponents. One perspective on social movements suggests that success in generating support turns on a movement’s ability to engage in interpretive work known as *framing* (Benford and Snow, 2000; Snow, 2004; Snow et al., 1986). Movements actively engage and construct meanings for audiences through core processes of diagnostic, prognostic, and motivational framing. Subsequent collective action frames ‘serve an interpretive function by focusing, articulating, and extending meanings to activate adherents, transform bystanders into supporters, exact concessions from targets, and demobilize antagonists’ (Snow and Byrd, 2007: 124). Social ties are the conduits through which these consensus-building processes unfold and, thus, shape their trajectories.

Klandermans (1984: 586) points out that the degree to which consensus and support has been mobilized ‘can be measured by the extent to which [social movement-defined collective] goods are known and valued.’ Social ties again play a central role in mobilizing consensus because they greatly affect (a) how aware people are of a collective good and (b) the degree to which they value that collective good. Understanding how social ties influence (a) and (b) requires that we understand two key features of network ties.

The first of these is 'strength,' which is a function of 'the amount of time invested in [a tie], its emotional intensity, intimacy, mutual trust and exchange of services' (Granovetter, 1973, as cited in Boekkooi et al., 2011: 224). Strong ties can be tremendously important in getting people to support movement goals/tactics and to value a collective good because people's opinions are influenced by individuals in those groups most important to them. On the other hand, weak ties may be of value to a social movement in instances when there already exist mobilization potentials from which a movement can draw. In some cases, it may be enough to simply spread information about the campaign as widely as possible through various mass media outlets with the hope that individuals' weak ties will connect different groups (Granovetter, 1973, as cited in Boekkooi et al., 2011: 225). In other cases, it may make more sense for movement organizers to overcome the limitations of their own strong ties by relying on 'activist channels such as activist papers, email lists, blogs, or websites' (Boekkooi et al., 2011: 225).

Aside from its strength, a tie's 'value' can also affect the generation and differentiation of movement support. This second characteristic of network ties refers to 'whether the relationship among [individuals constituting the social tie] is positive, neutral or negative' (Boekkooi et al., 2011: 224). For instance, if group A and group B have a positive social tie, then if group A displays high levels of awareness of and highly values a collective good, group B is likely to behave similarly and display support for the social movement in question. Conversely, individuals also form opinions by way of contrast with groups to which they do not belong, groups that may be viewed as antagonists (Kitts, 2006).

Additionally, as Viterna (2013) points out, it is likely that identity processes help explain why social ties and commitments to others help generate the sort of ideological affinity needed to jumpstart micromobilization. As an individual begins to see his or her friends and family members engaging in social movement participation, that individual becomes more likely to believe that social movement participants are 'just like me.' And this is particularly true if potential participants view themselves as sharing identities with those already engaged in the movement (Viterna, 2013: 53). Of course, because an individual's social ties can compete with one another, pulling the individual in different directions, his or her multiple identities too compete and, at the end of the day, the most salient identity will win out. Thus, only when pre-existing salient identities are compatible with new 'participation identities' will this lead to an increase in an individual's likelihood of becoming mobilized. It is in these multiple ways that social ties may influence the differentiation of movement support.

Differentiating motivation. Once ideological affinity for the cause has been generated, this support has to then be transformed into motivation. Motivation then mediates support for a movement and actual participation in a movement. Scholars have identified four general collective action motives – instrumentality, identity, emotion, and ideology (Van Stekelenburg and Klandermans, 2010). I consider each of these briefly and then examine how social ties can help differentiate between those motivated and unmotivated to participate in collective action.

Being asked to participate or support a movement generates motivation by encouraging people to think about the potential costs and benefits associated with participation

(Klandermans and Oegema, 1987). Klandermans (1984) argues that collective action motivation rests on an instrumental calculation of collective benefits and social and non-social selective incentives. Collective benefit is calculated by multiplying the value of an end and the expectation that the end will be achieved. Motivated individuals value the 'end' pursued *and* believe that 'end' can be achieved. Expectations for success are a composite of expectations about participation from others, as well as the expectation that one's own participation will lead to a successful outcome.

However, group-based identity also influences motivation (Van Stekelenburg and Klandermans, 2010). Willingness to participate can also hinge on the strength of an individual's identification with a particular group (Stryker et al., 2000). Simon and Klandermans (2001) found that individuals were more highly motivated to participate when identification with an aggrieved group was subsequently translated into identification with a particular social movement or social movement organization.

Both sociologists (see e.g., Goodwin et al., 2001; Jasper, 1997, 1998, 2011) and social psychologists alike have recognized the role emotions play in micromobilization. Social psychologists like Van Zomeren et al. (2004), for instance, found that, in addition to instrumental motives, emotion – ignited by anger tethered to individual perceptions of unfairness, perceptions believed to be shared with other group members – offered a distinct pathway to becoming willing to participate. Rational calculation and affective response, thus, offer separate yet potentially reinforcing pathways to collective action motivation. Alternatively, Van Stekelenburg and Klandermans (2010: 183) suggested that emotions could serve as accelerators – by making willingness translate faster into actual collective action – or amplifiers – by strengthening individuals' pre-existing motivations to participate.

Ideology offers a final unique path by which individuals become willing to participate in collective action (Van Stekelenburg and Klandermans, 2010). Whereas instrumental approaches emphasized the role of rational calculation, identity approaches focused on the strength of group identification, and emotion approaches noted how perceived injustices generate action-oriented emotions, ideology approaches suggest that willingness to participate in collective action also rests on values. Such values may be, on the one hand, individual or, on the other, held to be sacred to all members of a specific group.

Social ties play a critical role in transforming this constellation of individual motives into a collective group identity that serves as the basis of collective action. Roger Gould's (1995) work on the relationship between identity, social relations, and collective action showcases how social relations shape collective identities, and, by extension, motivation to participate. Gould argues that individuals possess several identities, any number of which can motivate participation in collective action. These identities, however, become more or less salient as one's context, conceived of as the social networks in which one is embedded, changes. As Gould states, 'the social categories (class, race, nation, and so on) within which individuals see themselves as aligned with or against other individuals depend on the conceptual mapping of the social relations in which they are involved and on the partitioning of people into collectivities whose boundaries are logically implied by this mapping' (Gould, 1995: 17).

The collective identity that serves as the basis for collective action and is a powerful source of motivation, Gould terms 'participation identity,' formally defining it as 'the

social identification with respect to which an individual responds in a *given instance of social protest* to specific normative and instrumental appeals' (1995: 13). Gould's insights suggest that the (re)structuring of one's social ties may have a significant influence on which identity becomes salient at a given historical juncture, and, thus, which identity (and by extension, ideologies) can possibly serve as the motivational basis for collective action.

Indeed, there is a growing body of evidence suggesting that the structure of a network – either the patterns of connections among individuals (e.g., Chwe, 1999; Gould, 1993) or the ways in which individuals are positioned within networks (e.g., Borgatti and Everett, 1992; Gould, 1993; Kim and Bearman, 1997) – can influence an individual's willingness to participate in social movement activism. Focusing on the former, for instance, Centola and Macy (2007) suggested that not all kinds of collective social behavior diffuse in the same way. While weak ties may facilitate the diffusion and adoption of all kinds of social behavior because they connect socially distant locations (Granovetter, 1973), Centola and Macy (2007) argue that the adoption of certain kinds of collective social behavior, such as high-risk activism, operates differently. Such forms of collective behavior operate as complex rather than simple contagions because they require multiple sources of social affirmation rather than a single source. As a result, for certain forms of collective social behavior to spread and gain momentum, it is not enough that weak ties exist among individuals in distant networks. An abundance of such weak ties between networks – instead of automatically facilitating the spread of 'complex contagions' like high-risk activism – may actually impede their adoption because the width of the bridges constructed by those long ties (e.g., the number of ties contained in the bridge) tends to be quite narrow (meaning there are usually too few sources of social affirmation contained in the bridge). What this means for multi-stage micromobilization modeling is that the differentiation of willingness to participate in social activism is not simply a function of the presence or absence of, for instance, a social tie to the movement or a likeminded friend, as is often thought. Instead, how and if such informal ties matter depends on whether the social behavior under investigation is a complex or simple contagion.

But it is not only informal social ties that matter. Networks of formal organizations can also play a critical role in motivating participation by 'fostering contacts that cross the boundaries established by the routines of everyday life' (Gould, 1995: 22). Not only do formal organizations help mobilize resources and direct action, but they also raise the ceiling on participation identity by generating 'social ties that encourage the recognition of commonalities on a scale considerably broader than would be expected on the basis of informal social networks alone' (Gould, 1995: 22).

Yet, in order for collective identity to spur mobilization it has to become more than just salient. It must become politicized (Van Stekelenburg and Klandermans, 2010). Politicized collective identity can be distinguished from collective identity in three respects. Politicized collective identity incorporates notions of shared grievance and identifies targets for which blame may be attributed (Simon and Klandermans, 2001) and also helps construct oppositional groups and allies. Finally, politicized collective identity orients behavior away from inaction and toward action taking (Van Stekelenburg and Klandermans, 2010: 178).

Thus, a second important role social ties play in differentiating motivation to participate in collective action has to do with their ability to facilitate the transformation from collective identity to politicized collective identity. Besides helping establish collective grievances and consciousness, pre-existing mobilizing structures like informal interpersonal networks and formal organizations help generate and sustain willingness to participate in collective action by serving as the conduits through which framing processes are strategically enacted and used to attach those collective grievances to specific targets. Once blame has been allocated, desired compensations can be proposed and adjudicated on, and plans drawn up to collectively redress these shared grievances. Such information can then be disseminated within and across social networks through various media formats.

In sum, by merging insights from network studies with contemporary research in social psychology, I am suggesting social ties – whether conceived of as informal interpersonal networks or formal organizational linkages – help differentiate motivation to participate in collective action in two respects largely overlooked in contemporary sociological micromobilization studies. First, ties provide a relational structure in which participation identities can be used to form the basis of collective consciousness. Second, ties can help facilitate the transformation of this consciousness into a more politicized substance.

Differentiating participation. Despite best intentions, the supportive and willing often fail to actually participate. Motivation leads to participation when barriers to involvement are removed. In a survey of Dutch peace activism, Klandermans and Oegema (1987: 529), for instance, found that sickness, work commitments, and the like may have played a part in reducing participation. Barriers, however, can be removed and more motivation can help individuals overcome greater barriers. Ultimately, movements must help arouse this motivation, remove barriers, or do both in order to prevent non-participation through erosion and non-conversion (Oegema and Klandermans, 1994).

Here I focus on social ties' role in removing or managing barriers toward participation and highlight two important ways social ties do just that. First, social ties help generate awareness of opportunities to participate, thereby reducing information costs associated with these searches. Being asked to participate, for instance, is often highly predictive of eventual participation (Schussman and Soule, 2005; Verba et al., 1995). But being asked to participate 'works' partly because it influences who is aware of a movement and its activities. An invitation to participate links potential recruits with social movement organizations (Klandermans, 1984). When movements generate awareness of their key organizations, they are essentially reducing barriers to participation by reducing information costs associated with having to seek these groups out on one's own. This also holds for individuals who have already joined a movement organization or one of its affiliates and are, thus, more likely to have their 'information searches' conducted by the most committed individuals in the organization and its networks (Saunders et al., 2012: 266).

Along these lines, Verhulst and Walgrave (2009) found that the kinds of networks through which individuals are recruited often differ depending upon their status as a first-time or veteran protestor because the barriers faced by each of these groups differ dramatically. Based on protest survey data covering 18 demonstrations in eight different

nations, first-timers were found to be mobilized overwhelmingly through 'open' network channels, created by mass media for instance, that target the general population, rather than the more 'closed' network channels possessed by veteran protestors, such as formal organizational memberships or affiliations. Coupled with the finding that first-timers and veterans differ in terms of biographical availability and the kinds of motivations possessed and the strength of such motivations, it is worth recognizing that social ties not only help reduce barriers to participation, but also that different kinds of social ties may be more or less useful in reducing the unique sets of barriers facing first-timer versus veteran protestors.

Second, it is possible that interpersonal networks can help differentiate between participants and non-participants not only by removing barriers, but also by helping generate sufficient motivation for individuals to personally seek out ways to manage, downplay, or reimagine these barriers. When individuals who are both sympathetic and willing to participate have been asked to do so by individuals close to them in their interpersonal networks, this gives them impetus to seriously reflect on the potential collective benefits of and individual costs and benefits of participation. This calculation, in turn, may generate such levels of motivation that individuals personally seek out ways to manage, downplay, or reimagine present barriers. This kind of cost-benefit analysis of social incentives has been shown to play some role in micromobilization (Klandermans and Oegema, 1987), especially when individuals expect to succeed or when they believe social movement organizations to be highly efficacious (Barkan et al., 1993; Verhulst and Walgrave, 2009). In the end, social ties may not remove barriers, but they can initiate calculations that generate sufficient motivation for individuals to actively seek out ways to manage, downplay, or reimagine these barriers so they may participate.

To summarize, here I reconceptualized social ties as conduits of processes that probabilistically differentiate individuals at multiple analytically distinct steps in the micromobilization process. This is in contrast to widely held views in social movement literature suggesting (1) social ties deterministically influence micromobilization, and (2) do so at a single, pre-specified step in this process. Using this as my starting point, I then synthesized insights from social movement, social network, and social psychological literatures (primarily within sociology) to suggest novel and varied ways social ties could *probabilistically* distinguish individuals at *multiple* analytically distinct steps, rather than a single step, in the social movement micromobilization process. Doing so represents an extension of recent studies of micromobilization using multi-stage theory. Drawing on insights developed in this article thus far, I end by outlining a research agenda that suggests new avenues for future empirical research on social movement micromobilization.

Avenues for future research

Participation in what?

While participation remains an important focus of social movement research, there has been little effort to ask, participation in what *kind* of mobilization exactly? Focusing on identifying analytically distinct micromobilization steps or combinations of steps, as

well as thinking about how unique factors and processes differentiate individuals at each of these steps, draws our collective attention to this overlooked empirical question.

First, the processes differentiating individuals at each step in the micromobilization process may vary based on whether or not participation is classified as low-risk/cost or high-risk/cost. Saunders et al. (2012: 266), for instance, suggest that ambiguous and conflicting results surrounding biographical availability's influence in differentiating participants from non-participants are, in part, 'artifacts of the different research contexts studied,' some of which could undoubtedly be classified as high-risk/cost and others as low-risk/cost. In other words, differentiation based on biographical availability may depend on the variable risk and costs associated with the activism. And this may, in fact, hold for a variety of other key factors, such as social ties. Second, by extension, the form of collective action in which individuals are engaged – whether it be rallies or sit-ins, petition signing or street demonstrations – may involve their own unique set of steps. And, again, the specific processes differentiating individuals at each of these unique steps may differ as this form differs. Along these lines, but thinking even more broadly, the general character of the movement may matter. For instance, the emerging consensus on the mobilization of reactive and proactive social movements is that reactive movements are driven largely by threatening contextual shifts, whereas proactive movements mobilize in response to fluctuations in the political opportunity structure and relevant resource and organizational bases (Almeida, 2003; Blee, 2006; McVeigh, 2009; Martin and Dixon, 2010; Van Dyke and Soule, 2002). Proactive movements involve 'claims making by disadvantaged minorities' (McAdam et al., 2005: 2), whereas reactive mobilization is aimed at defending the status quo and/or reclaiming real or perceived losses of resources and power among advantaged groups (McVeigh, 2009; Tilly, 1978). However, to fully understand why proactive and reactive movements mobilize differently at the macro-level requires further examination of the sort of micromobilization processes highlighted in this article.

Current micromobilization literature, however, presents roadblocks to addressing these issues. Studies at the intersection of social psychology and collective action, for instance, tend to focus overwhelmingly on protest participation. Or when they do measure a variety of action forms, they lump them together in an index (Wright, 2009). Case-based studies of collective action also tend to focus mostly on protest participation or treat 'participation' as a catchall for a variety of distinct forms of collective action. Here, I am not claiming that each different form of collective action *does* involve a unique set of micromobilization steps, but I am suggesting that this question remains an overlooked one worthy of further investigation.

Finally, the issue, cause, or purpose underlying mobilization may have a significant impact on both the steps involved and the processes of differentiation at each of these. Indeed, this was one, among several, underlying themes of a multinational project – Caught in the Act of Protest: Contextualizing Contestation (CCC) – that was the subject of a special issue in the journal *Mobilization*. In the words of project organizers, 'the type of demonstration, the mobilization context, and the features of a country determine who shows up, why, and how' (Van Stekelenburg et al., 2012: 253). In other words, who shows up, why, and how should be treated as variable. A small but growing body of literature confirms this (Van Stekelenburg et al., 2009). Verhulst (2011), for instance, found

that different issues affected not only the *kinds* of individuals that showed up to participate in protest, but also influenced *how* individuals were mobilized. Blee (1996, 2011) and Munson (2008) – studying distinct social movements, both of which, however, fell under the larger umbrella of right-wing conservatism – found that more often than not, individuals were initially drawn into these right-wing movements through some form of a social tie rather than because of personal ideology. Such a finding is counterintuitive and stands in contrast with numerous studies of politically progressive mobilization that find the opposite.

This anomalous result may exist for, at least, two reasons. First, it may be due, in part, to the fact that there are far fewer studies of groups on the right, meaning we are less likely to observe a context in which ties are not important. On the other hand, if the issue, cause, or purpose underlying collective action influences the structure of recruitment, this finding may reflect the fact that collective action predicated on right-wing ideology mobilizes differently than politically progressive collective action. More research is obviously needed, but adopting the analytic strategies developed in this article helps reveal such an interesting, understudied research avenue.

Why stop with actual participation?

As Saunders et al. (2012: 263) recently noted, ‘relatively little attention [has been] devoted to understanding the differences among those who protest more and less intensely and/or persistently.’ However, the leading model of micromobilization considered in this article treats participation as a final step in the micromobilization process. But why stop with actual participation? Can this step itself be further refined into a series of micro processes? In this respect, Gould’s (1995) work on the French Commune is, again, instructive. Gould found that informal social ties played an important causal role even *after* participation had been initiated. That is, social ties affected the character of the ongoing participation – its intensity and sustainability. Munson (2008) hinted that moral shock could play a role in sustaining participation, thereby implying participation could itself be treated as an ongoing process rather than a final end point. Viterna (2013) argues that the same factors shaping initial mobilization should also influence remobilization. Given that emotion, informal ties, and networks shape the intensity and sustainability of participation, initial participation and the inputs predicting it become not simply an outcome to be explained but also an important part of explaining continued participation.

Corrigan-Brown’s (2011: 4) mixed methods research on activists’ trajectories of engagement over time is especially illuminating in this regard. Encouraging scholars to view activism as a ‘process whereby people participate with varying degrees of continuity’ rather than a series of discrete, disconnected episodes, Corrigan-Brown highlights four different trajectories individuals undergo after initial activism: persistence (continue to participate), transfer (hop from one social movement organization to the next), individual abeyance (disengage from a social movement organization only to return to activism at a later time), and disengagement (permanently cease all participation in activism). While some activists persist or transfer – as was the case for many activists exiting the civil rights movement of the 1960s in the United States, only to be quickly drawn into the women’s rights or human rights movements due to shared tactics among the movements

(Meyer and Whittier, 1994; Tarrow, 1998) – many display a trajectory of individual abeyance in which episodes of engagement wax and wane yet remain connected over time through *individual abeyance structures* (Corrigall-Brown, 2011: 8; see also Fendrich, 1993; McAdam, 1988; Sherkat and Blocker, 1997). Rather than conceptualizing these episodes as discrete and disconnected, Corrigall-Brown (2011) suggests they are loosely and coherently bound through networks, ideologies, goals, and tactics developed through initial engagement. By extension, initial participation in activism is not so much a *final* step but is, in many respects, the *beginning* of a unique set of outcomes cohered by processes warranting further investigation.

What about feedback effects?

Researchers tend to discuss micromobilization as if the steps outlined in their models are both given and static. Recall that Klandermans and Oegema's (1987) model operated in a sequential and uni-directional manner. One step follows the next. Yet, conceptualizing micromobilization as an ongoing process may lead one to question this collective wisdom. Consider, for instance, a scenario in which actual participation in movement-related activities strengthens or weakens subsequent willingness to participate and/or movement support. The idea, while under-explored in the literature, is not absent *in toto*. McAdam (1986), focusing exclusively on high-risk activism, suggested participation might spur deepening ideological socialization and formation of an activist identity, one basis of motivation. Beyerlein and Hipp (2006) assumed a reciprocal relationship existed between participation and willingness to participate and then empirically tested this assumption. Work by Craig Calhoun (1994), James Jasper (1997), and Alberto Melucci (1996) lends weight to the argument that collective identity formation – and, hence, motivation to participate – can be an outcome of participation as much as it can be a critical step toward participation.

Social psychological work on the emergence of crowd behavior and social change also buttresses my call for a more processual approach to micromobilization in which feedback effects may matter. Work by Drury and Reicher (2005, 2009), for instance, highlighted the ongoing interplay between feelings of empowerment – that is 'confidence in one's ability to challenge existing relations of domination' (Drury and Reicher, 2005: 35) – and participation in collective action. Empowerment, they suggested, was both a precursor to and product of collective action. By extension, initial participation in collective action may lay the groundwork for subsequent motivations, such as empowerment, that can, in turn, spur future engagement in activism. Finally, a recent empirical study by Tausch and Becker (2013) underscores my call for more work in this area. Using a two-wave longitudinal study design of student protests against tuition fees in Germany, the authors found that persistent participation in collective action was partially driven by individuals' emotional reactions to prior experiences of both success and failure within the movement, thus providing some initial empirical evidence for a more processual conceptualization of micromobilization in which analytically distinct stages can operate recursively. Despite such promising work, the overwhelming majority of traditional micromobilization research has been wedded, both in its conceptual and empirical modeling, to the idea that micromobilization is a series of discrete steps arrayed in a uni-directional manner. We would do well to explore alternative possibilities.

Conclusion

Micromobilization constitutes a vital research stream within social movement studies, and this article develops a stronger analytical framework for understanding the phenomenon. Despite a wealth of empirical studies and advances in multi-stage theory, research is still hampered by several issues. This article unearthed shortcomings in this literature and offered solutions. Merging insights from distinct, yet interrelated research streams, I first developed a synthesized conceptualization of micromobilization and then organized relevant research around key conceptual axes. In so doing, I pointed out limitations associated with the dominant model of micromobilization, which I termed the affinity-initiated model (for a discussion of alternative models, see Blee, 1996; Munson, 2008). I then drew on insights from existing social movement literature, social psychology, and network analysis to provide a reformulation and extension of work falling under this model. Rather than treating social ties and recruitment as a causally necessary step at a predetermined point in the micromobilization process, I theorized novel ways in which social ties might, instead, probabilistically facilitate the differentiation of individuals at multiple analytically distinct steps in the micromobilization process. Thus, my central argument is that instead of viewing recruitment through social networks as a necessary stage in the micromobilization process, scholars should instead consider social ties as conduits of processes that can affect the likelihood of a person being selected in or out at each analytically distinct step. I am, therefore, suggesting scholars move away from thinking of recruitment through social ties as a *causally necessary* factor in an individual's transition from one step to the next. Rather, social ties increase or decrease (or, in some cases [e.g., Jasper, 1997], have no effect) the likelihood of an individual being selected in or out at any given step in the multi-stage process. Importantly, this reorientation also encourages researchers to examine precisely how and why social ties matter at *multiple* points throughout the micromobilization process, and I have provided initial answers by synthesizing diverse (primarily sociological) literatures on social ties, social psychology, and collective action. Finally, based on the analytic template developed in this article, I suggested several avenues for future research, all of which warrant further empirical investigation.

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Author biography

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Résumé

La recherche sur la micromobilisation joue un rôle crucial dans l'étude des mouvements sociaux. En dépit de l'abondance des études empiriques et des progrès récents de la théorie de la micromobilisation, la recherche dans ce domaine est toujours confrontée à de nombreuses difficultés. Après avoir recensé les faiblesses conceptuelles, empiriques et méthodologiques existant dans la littérature de la micromobilisation, je suggère un certain nombre de pistes de réflexion. Dans un premier temps, je propose une définition claire de la micromobilisation en opérant la synthèse de deux courants de recherche distincts, mais étroitement liés. Le premier met l'accent sur le processus de recrutement et de persuasion des militants et des sympathisants potentiels alors que l'autre distingue analytiquement les différents stades de la micromobilisation. Cette première approche sert de tremplin pour évaluer les forces et les faiblesses d'un modèle de micromobilisation qui recueille depuis longtemps une large adhésion, celui du « modèle par affinité ». Je me propose alors d'élargir ce modèle en combinant différentes idées tirées de la littérature des mouvements sociaux, de la psychologie sociale et de l'analyse des réseaux, tout en mettant l'accent sur les méthodes inédites et souvent

négligées qui permettent de différencier les individus par leurs liens sociaux à différents stades analytiques du processus de micromobilisation. En m'appuyant sur cette démarche analytique, je recense finalement plusieurs orientations pour les futurs travaux de recherche sur la micromobilisation.

Mots-clés

Micromobilisation, mouvement social, militantisme, liens sociaux, théorie des stades multiples

Resumen

La investigación sobre micro-movilización constituye una corriente vital dentro de los estudios de los movimientos sociales. A pesar de una gran cantidad de investigación empírica y los últimos avances en la teoría micro-movilización, la investigación está siendo obstaculizada por una miríada de problemas. Este trabajo identifica las debilidades conceptuales, empíricas y metodológicas en la literatura sobre micro-movilización y ofrece soluciones. En primer lugar, proporcionar una definición clara de micro-movilización al sintetizando dos diferentes, aunque interrelacionados, caminos de investigación que, por una parte, hacen hincapié en los procesos mediante los cuales las organizaciones de movimientos sociales intentan reclutar partidarios e influenciar participantes potenciales y, por otro lado, enumerar varios pasos analíticamente distintos que componen la micro-movilización. Usando esto como un trampolín, enseguida evaluaré las fortalezas y debilidades de un modelo de largamente popular de micro-movilización que denomino "modelo de afinidad iniciada". Extiendo este modelo de micro-movilización de manera significativa mediante la fusión de ideas existentes de movimiento social, psicología social y las literaturas de análisis de redes, la localización de la novela y pasaba por alto maneras lazos sociales, en particular, facilitan la diferenciación de los individuos en las etapas analíticamente distintas en el proceso micro-movilización. Por último, identifiqué varias vías para la investigación futura sobre micro-movilización abiertas por el enfoque analítico desarrollado en este trabajo.

Palabras clave

Micro-movilización, movimientos sociales, activismo, lazos sociales, teoría de múltiples etapas